Changing one's own feelings : a posteriori self-knowledge and emotions in Spinoza and Shaftesbury

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Changing one's own Feelings: Spinoza and Shaftesbury on Philosophy as Therapy

Abstract: In my paper, I suggest comparing Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's accounts in regard to their views on how philosophical reflection can change our emotions. The first part discusses three aspects of their concepts of emotion that support the idea of therapeutic effects provided by philosophical reflection: 1) the naturalness of emotions, 2) cognitivism and 3) the activity and passivity of emotions.

The second part examines how both philosophers conceive of the effects philosophical reflection is thought to have on our emotions. Starting with some remarks on contemporary views on how self-knowledge may be constitutive for our mental life, I argue that neither Spinoza's nor Shaftesbury's account relies on constitutivist assumptions. On the contrary, although they reject the idea of a direct influence of rational thinking on the emotions, they both develop convincing accounts that allow for an indirect influence of cognitive processes on our emotional dispositions.

In the last few years, there has been an increasing interest in the idea that philosophy is to be conceived of as some kind of therapy. To clarify this idea, philosophers have either investigated Hellenistic ethics,[1] the ideas of the later Wittgenstein,[2] or Freud's psychoanalysis.[3] But the idea that philosophy is a kind of therapy is also widespread in early modern philosophy. In this paper, I will focus on Spinoza and Shaftesbury who are both deeply concerned with the emotions and who, also, ascribe philosophy a therapeutic effect.[4]

1 Cf. Gill 1985, Voelke 1993, and in particular Hadot 1995 who is most influential for this reading of Hellenistic philosophy.

2 Cf. e.g. Fischer 2004.

3 Philosophical readings of Freud are defended in particular by Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell, cf. Rorty 1988 and Cavell 1994, for a reading of Cavell cf. Hampe 2006.

4 Therapeutical conceptions of philosophy are quite common in early modern philosophy. One of the most ambitious thinker in this respect is surely Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus who, in his *Medicina Mentis*, promotes philosophy not only as a method for acquiring a better understanding of how things are, but also as a means of moderating one's own passions, of conserving one's health, as well as, finally, of educating one's own children wisely. Cf. Tschirnhaus 1963, 42 (first published in 1695).

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At first glance, one might be puzzled by this choice. Why, one might thus ask, do I compare two philosophers who do not seem to have anything in common except for their stoic heritage and their interest in human emotions? It is true, there are more differences than commonalities between Spinoza and Shaftesbury. They differ in their method, their style of writing, and in their scientific interests: Spinoza, dealing with Cartesian physics and writing *more geometrico*, Shaftesbury, concerned with aesthetic issues and producing texts such as the hymn of Zeus. However, when it comes to the question of a therapeutic understanding of philosophy a comparison is quite instructive.

As already mentioned, they both ascribe therapeutic effects to philosophy. More interestingly, they do not regard these as mere side effects. In Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* methodological discussions explicitly consider the good provided by true knowledge, as some kind of remedy.[5] Shaftesbury's therapeutic aspirations, on the other hand, are reflected in the very form of his writings. In the *Soliloquy*, he explicitly suggests that his approach is a "Practice, and Art of Surgery", in which the doctor and the patient are the same person.[6] It is therefore to discuss their understanding of philosophy as some kind of therapy that I juxtapose Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's approaches.

However, I am not concerned with the rhetorical use of the notion "therapy" itself, but rather in the psychological and epistemological presuppositions that support the idea of therapeutic effects produced by philosophical self-reflection. How do we have to conceive of emotions in order to allow for the idea that philosophical reflection can change them? What kind of knowledge of oneself is required for successful therapeutic self-reflection? Do we have to explain the natural origins of our emotions, or is the insight into their meaning all that matters? And how, finally, is the therapeutic efficacy of philosophical reflection explained? It is against the background of these questions that I will compare Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's views on the emotions and on philosophical self-knowledge.

1 The Concept of Emotion

Let me start with a rather sketchy comparison between Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's concept of emotion. I would like to emphasize three points:

5 Spinoza 1985, I, 10.
6 Shaftesbury 1981, II/2, 42–44.

a) Naturalness. Spinoza and Shaftesbury, both describe human emotions as natural phenomena.[7] The interesting question is, however, what precisely they have in mind. Neither of them maintains a reductionist view according to which mental phenomena can be reduced to bodily states.[8] The emphasis which they both put on the natural origin of human emotions is rather a question of seeing man as a part of nature. Primarily they take a stance against the assumption of any super-natural, transcendent causation.

But there are important differences to be made. Spinoza's naturalism involves the rejection of any notion of creation, and I take it that also his claim that emotions are natural entities has to be understood as precluding any teleological consideration. Instead, they are merely regarded as effects of certain efficient causes. As the most important efficient cause he points to the *conatus*, which I would interpret as the aimless tendency of beings to persevere in a given state.[9] Shaftesbury, in contrast, conceived of nature as a harmonious systematic order that could result only from divine design.[10] In consequence, he seeks to explain our emotions in terms of a natural teleology according to which emotions express the relation of individuals to their environment.[11] His characterization of affections as natural thus stresses the idea of man being in harmony with the order of nature as well as with all mankind, and what he refers to as "unnatural affections" are emotions that are not directed to any public or private good.

Notwithstanding these conceptual differences, the claim that emotions are natural phenomena is in both approaches an important background for the legitimacy of the idea that philosophy produces therapeutic effects. In particular, Spinoza and Shaftesbury both reject the notion that passions are the offspring of our sinful nature. This, in turn, results in several important conse-

7 This is quite obvious in the case of Spinoza who, in the preface of book three of the *Ethics*, criticizes former approaches for treating the affects as if they were "things which are outside nature", Spinoza 1985, 491. Shaftesbury's stance in this respect is less explicitly expressed, but see his *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, where he considers affects in relation to the "Interest" or "Good" or "End" of every creature "to which every thing in his constitution must *naturally* refer", cf. Shaftesbury 1981ff., II, 2, 44. It can be assumed that Shaftesbury, similarly to Spinoza, conceives of the emotions as parts of nature, although there are obvious differences in how nature is characterized.

8 The option of maintaining a physicalist reductionism also existed in the seventeenth century, see for instance Gassendi or Henricus Regius, who both, though on different grounds, develop materialist views on the mental.

9 See Renz 2008, 316–321 and Renz 2010a, 246–250 for a critical discussion of different interpretations of the concept of *conatus*.

10 Cf. Gill 2008, 11–12, and Müller 2010.

11 Cf. also Schmitter 2010, 2.

quences regarding the emotions as well the function of philosophy. First, they both assume that emotions can be moderated or even altered, but not eliminated by philosophical reflection. Furthermore, they both assume that religious practices can be replaced in philosophy by the activity of contemplation. What we feel towards things depends to some degree on how we think of things.

b) Cognitivism.[12] For Spinoza as well as for Shaftesbury, emotions include a cognitive aspect; they both consider them as states that involve representation, and, hence provide some basic information. This is not very surprising, for it derives, at least partially, from their Stoic heritage. It is however interesting to see how they further develop this idea. Let me start with the commonality. Spinoza and Shaftesbury both assume that emotions can be evaluated from an epistemological perspective, and this presupposes not merely that emotions involve representations, but, moreover, that they can be judged in respect to their truth and justification, or in historical terms in respect to their adequacy.

One might object that this epistemological approach is rather problematic, for many emotions such as love, devotion or disgust are neutral in respect to the question of truth, whereas others are even essentially based on ignorance. Hope, for instance, is by definition an emotion that relies on ignorance about some future state of the world.[13] I think this objection is valid insofar as it concerns truth, but not insofar as it concerns justification. To be sure, many emotions do not presuppose the truth of the assumptions or ideas involved, whereas for others like hope it is even a necessary condition that they rely on uncertain belief which cannot constitute knowledge. But we can still clearly distinguish between more or less rational, more or less justifiable instances of hope, even though hope is indeed an emotion that presupposes ignorance. Hence, the denial that emotions are typically related to knowledge does not preclude that it makes sense to evaluate our emotional life epistemologically. But this is indeed essential if philosophy is thought to have a therapeutic effect. If there was no systematic connection between the degree of adequacy of our beliefs and the emotional quality of our feelings, epistemic improvement could not result in more happiness.

However, apart from this general common ground, there are also fundamental differences between Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's cognitivism. First, they talk about different forms of knowledge or cognition that constitute our emotions. To use contemporary terminology, one could say that Spinoza sug-

12 See Renz 2010b, for a discussion of why cognitivism in respect to the emotions is important for therapeutic notions of philosophy.

13 See Wild 2008 for critical objections towards any kind of affective epistemology.

gests some kind of judgment theory. According to his definition of affect, emotions necessarily involve ideas,[14] and every idea contains some moment of endorsement.[15] Shaftesbury's approach, in contrast, is rather a kind of perception theory. The experience of emotions is due to a kind of sensitive capacity, and it is "the Forms and Images of Things" which are perceived.[16] Feelings arise from the perception of certain qualities or relations in the world, such as proportion or order, and it is therefore no surprise that Shaftesbury portrays the emotional mind as a spectator or auditor of the order of nature and of human characters.[17] And this is indeed an important prerequisite for his views on the role of aesthetics in moral and emotional education.

Second, they differ on the specific contents of emotions. In Spinoza, emotions provide information about the increasing or diminishing of our individual power. For Shaftesbury, in contrast, emotional experiences register the systematic order or disorder in the mind. This amounts to a completely different view on the relation between emotions and morality. In Spinoza, the nature of emotions implies that egoism is not only the origin, but also the only rational ground for moral claims. For Shaftesbury, in contrast, feeling creatures do not primarily pursue their own happiness and well-being, but the order of the system on which their happiness and well-being depends. Emotions thus reveal a sense of nature as a whole, of mankind, and even of the whole of our individual mind.[18]

c) Activity and passivity. In his definition of affect, Spinoza distinguishes between two kinds of emotion: actions and passions, a distinction he later associates with that between bondage and freedom.[19] Humans are considered

14 Cf. 3def3, Spinoza 1985, 493.

15 This endorsement is not due to rational judgment, but consists originally in the striving activity of the *conatus* which takes the form of affirming ideas in our mental activities. Cf. also Della Rocca 2003.

16 "As in the sensible kind, the Species or Images of Bodys, Colours and Sounds, are perpetually moving before our Eyes, and acting on our Senses […], so in the moral and intellectual kind, the Forms and Images of Things are no less active and incumbent on the Mind." Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 68. I think that Shaftesbury's position comes close to the one maintained by Roberts who conceives of the emotions as concern based construals, cf. Roberts 1988, 184.

17 "The Mind, which is Spectator or Autitor of other Minds cannot be without its Eye and Ear; so as to discern Proportion distinguish Sound, and scan each Sentiment or Thought that comes before it […]", Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 66–68.

18 See in particular Shaftesbury's consideration of the nature and extension of natural affection in the unpublished *Philosophical Regimen*, where he defines natural affection as follows: "To have natural affection is to affect according to nature or the design and will of nature." Cf. Rand 1992, 3.

19 Cf. 3def3 and the preface to part 4. Spinoza 1985, 493 and 543.

slaves when they are subject to passions; whereas the free man is characterized as someone who experiences only actions. This may partly be due to the influence of the Stoic theory of emotions that distinguishes passions categorically from the good emotions of the wise.[20]

Strikingly, however, most of Spinoza's psychology, as it is developed in part three of the *Ethics,* deals with passive emotions. It seems as if our ordinary emotional life consists of passions only. For Shaftesbury, in contrast, already "the Sense of Right and Wrong" which is understood as natural affection and described as "*an original one* of earliest Rise in the Soul or affectionate part" expresses our freedom.[21] Thereby, he of course did not mean to imply that emotions are controlled by our will. On the contrary, like Spinoza, Shaftesbury denies that emotions can be changed, unless "contrary Affection, by frequent check and control" operates on them.[22] The point is rather that natural affection operates on the basis of our imagination, and for Shaftesbury imagination is not, as for Spinoza, a purely mechanistic process. On the contrary, imagination essentially involves an element of original anticipation; it is, in other words, the capacity of "anticipating Fancy".[23] We thus become aware of the aesthetic and moral quality of things by imagining them in relation to the whole of a system, a relation we perceive as harmonious or disharmonious.[24]

Clearly, this difference has a considerable influence on the conception of therapy. For Spinoza, therapeutic reflection must be guided by reason, even if it makes use of the imagination. As regards the goal of philosophical therapy, Spinoza puts a strong emphasis on the activity of the mind. Finally, he assumes that freedom is only seldom attained and if so, only after a long and difficult process. Shaftesbury's views are quite different. First, the goal of therapy is not to "rule" or "moderate" the emotions by reason, but to reestablish the original harmony in our mind and in relation to nature. This implies that natural affections do not have to be cured as such. Secondly, reflection is rather an aesthetic than a rational process. In reflection we visualize our mental states in a way that at the same time cultivates the order among them, with the effect that certain distortions of our affective life disappear.

20 Cf. also Buddensiek 2008, 27 and 90f.
21 Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 92.
22 Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 92.
23 Cf. Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 92. That anticipating involves activity rather than passivity is also emphasized by Baum 2001, 198ff.; Kringler 2010, 130; Schrader 1984, 15f.; and Uehlein 1976, 142f.
24 Cf. also Shaftesbury 1981ff., I/2, 258ff.

To summarize, we can say that Spinoza and Shaftesbury both conceptualize human emotionality in a way that is consistent with the assumption that emotions can, in principle, be changed by reflective processes. Yet, they develop quite different concepts of emotion that suggest different methods of philosophical therapy. In the next section therefore, I would like to have a closer look at their ideas about how self-reflection and, hence, philosophy is thought to have an effect on our emotions.

2 Philosophical self-reflection

In contemporary philosophy, the term self-knowledge is mostly used to address the problem of our epistemic access to our own mental states. In ordinary life, in contrast, we make a different use of the notion of self-knowledge. Whereas in the philosophy of mind, the term 'self-knowledge' designates the immediate relation we have to our occurring mental states, in ordinary life it refers to our knowledge of ourselves as persons as well as of those mental dispositions or personal traits which make up our character.

One could of course distinguish terminologically between these two phenomena and use the term 'self-knowledge' exclusively to refer to our immediate awareness of our mental states and apply, instead, the phrase 'knowledge of oneself as a person' to designate the self-knowledge we speak of in ordinary life. But while such a distinction prevents terminological confusion, it does not solve the theoretical problems one is confronted with when discussing the influence of self-reflection on our emotional states and attitudes. It can be assumed, on the one hand, that in therapeutic self-reflection we aim at something more demanding than mere awareness of our actual mental states. We wonder for instance, whether some difficulty which repeatedly affects us is caused by some emotional disposition hitherto unknown. On the other hand, unless emotions are assumed to be completely independent from any influence of human thought, one has to admit that improvement in our understanding of our personality can have an influence on how we feel, and this implies that also the content of our awareness is altered. One can thus surmise that the very idea of therapeutic reflection relies on the assumption of some interdependency between the conception of our own personality or our knowledge of ourselves and the quality of those occurrent mental states that constitute the subject-matter of immediate self-awareness.

At this point, it is illuminating to have a look at a particular position in the contemporary debate about self-knowledge. Inspired by Wittgenstein, it has recently been suggested that we conceive of first-person-authority not pri-

marily in terms of *knowledge*, but rather of *constitution*, therefore this position is also called "constitutivism".[25] It is essential for constitutivism that it not only denies that self-knowledge is based on observation, but that it instead rejects the idea of self-knowledge being an epistemic relation at all, since this would presuppose that our mental states are ontologically independent from us and our way of thinking.[26]

There is something right and important in this view. It seems, for instance, quite plausible that in reflecting on belief, we do not simply contemplate our actual convictions, but rather bring them about. As Richard Moran has argued, self-knowledge of what one actually believes is not a theoretical, but a deliberative question.[27] We do not wonder whether or not we actually believe p, but deliberate on the grounds that may be considered as evidence for p or as a reason to believe p. Furthermore, Moran has also convincingly shown that similarly we can take a deliberative stance towards at least some of our emotions. When we reflect on an instance of gratitude we usually do not wonder about the character of our feeling towards a person, but deliberate instead about the reasons for feeling grateful.

There are, however, other emotions that seem to be more ambiguous in this respect, e.g. envy, jealousy, or resentment. Of course, when we reflect about our resentment towards another person, we often also reflect on the grounds for feeling resentful.[28] But resentment, jealousy or envy, are also emotions we may discover with some surprise. Furthermore, unlike in the case of actual beliefs, we often cannot overcome these emotions with the rational insight that there is no good ground for them. It can be assumed that this is one of the rationales for why these emotions are often conceived of as passions. Thus, deliberating on the grounds for our emotions may have an impact on how we actually feel, but this is not a necessary and predictable result. We can thus conclude that we are not obliged to embrace a full-blown constitutive

25 This label is used in particular by Bilgrami 1998, 209ff.; Gertler 2011 speaks of a 'self-constitution' account.

26 See for instance Wright 1998, Bilgrami 1998 and Bar-On 2004, 122. The criticism that self-knowledge is mistakenly thought of in terms of epistemic access is also shared by Moran 2001, see below. It has to be emphasized however that Moran does not explicitly embrace constitutivism, and so far as I can see, it is not clear whether he really is committed to it, as is suggested in Gertlers overview 2011.

27 Moran 2001, 59.

28 Moran 2001, 85ff., also makes the case for resentment. I am however not sure whether Moran would oppose my view, for his interest is not to describe what we do when we reflect on our emotions, but rather what he would conceive of as a transparency relation that holds not just for beliefs, but for all mental attitudes. I agree with this point.

view, even though there is good reason to assume a constitutive moment in the relation to at least some of our mental states.

Keeping this in mind, I would now like to come back to Spinoza and Shaftesbury and their views on how philosophical reflection may have therapeutic effects. In particular, I would like to inquire whether there is some conceptual space in their accounts for the assumption of some moment of self-constitution.

Let us start with Spinoza. At first glance, one might think that the answer is simple. It is a common place that Spinoza rejects any kind of voluntarism; instead he embraces a strong determinism according to which all our ideas, and hence all our mental states and dispositions, including all instances of knowledge and rational belief, are completely determined by psychological mechanisms. This seems to suggest that the *Ethics* does not allow for the assumption of any influence of self-reflection on our actual mental states, and that instead, the naturalistic explanation of the external causes of the emotions is all that matters.

A closer view indicates however that Spinoza's position is more sophisticated. It is true that he does not engage in deliberative reflection about the grounds for our emotions. On the contrary, in the preface of the Third book of the *Ethics* he explicitly rejects any kind of rationalizing view of our emotional life. Emotions are a-rational phenomena which are to be explained in terms of their efficient causes. This does not preclude that we can distinguish between emotions which involve adequate knowledge and others which include nearly inadequate ideas, but it undermines the idea that emotions can be changed by the insight into our grounds for having them. Instead of thinking about the grounds for our feelings, we should therefore rather try to understand why we can have emotions which lack any rational or empirical basis. More effective, in other words, than any rationalizing about the emotions is the investigation of the psychological mechanisms that cause those inadequate ideas underlying our emotions.

But although Spinoza rejects the idea of rational reflection on the grounds of our feelings, there is still some conceptual space in his account for the claim that philosophical reflection can change our emotions. He assumes for instance that having adequate ideas amounts to a better life, since it enhances our *potentia agendi*.[29] Furthermore, if we know the psychological mechanisms behind our emotions, we can make use of this knowledge and either try to acquire a better understanding of the particular causes of certain emotions, or try to ignore those ideas which cause negative emotions. Finally, the *Ethics*

29 Cf. in particular 3p58 and 3p59. Spinoza 1985, 529.

also develops the option of meditating on our emotions in terms of their first cause, a perspective that necessarily leads to more peace and happiness.[30]

We can conclude that the therapeutic effect Spinoza ascribes to philosophical reflection is mainly to be explained in terms of the effects of knowledge in general, as well as the strategic use we make of our causal knowledge about psychology. And although this option to make therapeutic use of psychological knowledge relies on the possibility of an indirect influence of philosophical reflection on emotion, it does not require that our actual emotional states be directly constituted by it.[31]

Let us now turn to Shaftesbury. At first glance, one might expect that there is more room for self-constitution in his account than in Spinoza's. For Shaftesbury, the way human beings feel always concerns taking an attitude towards certain things. This can best be seen by the fact that Shaftesbury equates the natural affection of rational creatures with what he calls "the Sense of Right and Wrong", a capacity which is in turn characterized as the "first Principle in our Constitution and Make."[32] This sense does not however rely on abstract rational reflection, nor is it to be conceived of in sensualistic terms; it is rather a matter of paying attention to one's emotional responses to certain things. Thus, in a passage bearing the marginal note "Reflex Affection", Shaftesbury says:

> In a Creature capable of forming General Notions of Things, not only the outward Beings which offer themselves to the Sense, are the Objects of the Affections; but the very Action themselves, and the Affections of Pity, Kindness and Gratitude, and their Contrarys, being brought into the Mind by Reflection, become Objects. So that, by means of this reflected Sense, there arises another kind of Affection towards the Affection themselves, which have been already felt, and are now become the Subject of a new Liking or Disliking.[33]

This passage is illuminating in many respects. Shaftesbury claims here that human emotions, unlike those of merely sensible subjects which lack the

30 For an overview of the remedies for the affects cf. 5p20s. Spinoza 1985, 605.

31 On might wonder how this indirect influence of reflection is to be understood. I cannot discuss this problem here, since this relies on many claims Spinoza makes in his philosophy of mind. To put it in a nutshell, however, one can say that the therapeutic efficacy essentially relies on Spinoza's assumption of some kind of holism according to which any knowledge acquired in reflection determines our future mental states. See also Renz 2010a, 270–78 and 311ff.

32 Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 92.

33 Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 66. Unfortunately, these marginal notes which often introduce key words of Shaftesbury's terminology are missing in Lawrence E. Klein's edition of the *Characteristics*. I thank Angelica Baum who drew my attention to this passage. Her reconstruction of Shaftesbury's theory of emotions in 2001 is much inspired by it.

capacity of forming general notions of things, often have a reflexive structure.[34] They are not just about desired objects, but also exhibit the moral quality of the actions and passions actually represented in the mind. In addition, it is decisive that this reflection is itself an emotional state, for this suggests that it is as a result of its affective quality that reflection may have an impact on our emotions. Since, as Shaftesbury later explicitly claims, it is only the "frequent check and control" of "contrary Affection" that may change the direction of our natural temper.[35] This indicates that even though Shaftesbury allows for the idea of some kind of self-constitution, he does not think of it in terms of a direct influence of deliberative reflection on the emotions. But what notion of philosophical therapy does his view on reflex affection suggest?

To answer this question, first and foremost his approach must be considered in a broader perspective. In contrast to other philosophers referred to as Moral Sense theorists, Shaftesbury's primary interest is neither to develop a system of moral virtues nor to account for the origins of moral motivation.[36] Instead, his intent is to explore the possibility of education in moral issues, including the kind of self-education that takes place in philosophical reflection. His account is thus not a theory of moral value, but of moral education; and it is in the latter context that the concept of reflex affection is to be understood. The view that human beings are able to have emotions entailing a reflexive structure is a conceptual premise for the claim that contemplation of one's own as well as other people's emotions may contribute to the formation of moral attitudes. And this in turn is the reason for the assumption that art or literature, as well as therapeutic self-reflection, can have an influence on our virtues.

The passage cited does not however merely account for the possibility of the formation of moral attitudes. It also implies the influence of representations on our occurring feelings. The reflection on our affections results in another affection which is described as "a new Liking or Disking". How is this to be understood?

It is important, first, to note that this new liking or disliking is not brought about by deliberative reflection. In reflex affection we do not examine the grounds for our emotions, but consider the order or disorder in the relations

34 Cf. also Baum/Renz 2008, 364f., and in particular Baum 2001, 169ff., for a closer view of Shaftesbury's notion of "sensible rational Creatures".

35 Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 92.

36 Shaftesbury is often described as the founder of Moral Sense theory, and he did indeed coin the notion 'moral sense'. It can still be doubted whether the label 'Moral Sense theory' appropriately characterizes his account. See also Uehlein/Baum/Mudroch 2004, 65 for a discussion of this topic.

between a subject and its environments, as well as between certain emotions and the system of a whole mind. This requires that we take a distant perspective on ourselves, and not a deliberative stance. Reflex affection is thus essentially a matter of quasi aesthetic contemplation, and it is therefore not surprising that it results in an aesthetic mental state, namely liking or disliking.

Another point must be emphasized. Shaftesbury obviously assumes that reflex affection is an event that is ontologically distinct from the reflected emotion; otherwise it could consist in a *new* "Liking or Disliking". This point is quite important for a clear understanding of Shaftesbury's view on the therapeutic effects of philosophical reflection, for it indicates that this effect is not to be conceived of in terms of direct constitution. One therefore has to be careful here not to take Shaftesbury's terminology of constitution as an expression of a commitment to some kind of constitutivist view of self-knowledge. It is for quite different reasons that he ascribes to reflection a therapeutic effect than one might expect against the background of constitutivism. Shaftesbury assumes, on the one hand, that acquiring self-knowledge is a process of taking a distanced stance towards oneself. In the *Soliloquy*, he even interprets the Delphic inscription as demanding some kind of self-division:

> Recognize Your-self: which was as much as to say, *Divide your-self*, or *Be Two*.[37]

In the *Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*, on the other hand, the therapeutic effect of self-reflection is explained in terms of the emotional impact of reflex affection. Shaftesbury obviously assumes that the affective quality of reflex affection can exert some influence on our own mental life.[38]

One might question whether these two explanations for the therapeutic efficacy of self-reflection are compatible. Is it not inconsistent to conceive of the quest for self-knowledge in terms of self-division and to claim at the same time that moral reflection must consist of an emotional process? It would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this problem in detail. But I would like to point to two aspects already that might help to defend Shaftesbury. It has to be mentioned first that both explanations make use of the assumption of ontological distinctness between the reflected object and self-reflection. At least as far as this structural feature of self-reflection is concerned, there is consistency in Shaftesbury's views. Secondly, I would like to recall the aesthetic framework of Shaftesbury's approach. If reflection is understood in terms of aesthetic contemplation, then it seems quite natural to assume that

37 Shaftesbury 1981ff., I/1, 62.

38 Cf. in particular the passage already cited above on page XXX, Shaftesbury 1981ff., II/2, 92.

we can look at ourselves as if we were some kind of distant object, while the things we thereby discover may affect us in a deeply emotional way.

3 Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested comparing Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's accounts in regard to their views on how philosophical reflection can change our emotions. It has been shown that, while their theories of the emotions lead in different directions, they both provide a concept of emotion that allows for emotional changes brought about by cognitive processes. In the second part of the study, I reconstructed Spinoza's and Shaftesbury's quite different answers to the question of why philosophy may have a therapeutic effect. Starting with some remarks about contemporary views on how self-knowledge may be constitutive for our mental life, I argued that neither Spinoza's nor Shaftesbury's account relies on constitutivist presumptions. On the contrary, although they reject the idea of a direct influence of rational thinking on the emotions, they both develop convincing propositions that allow for an indirect influence of cognitive processes on our emotional dispositions. Yet, there are still many differences between their views.

When considering the history of philosophy, it thus becomes clear that there is more than just one conceptual model to account for the presumed therapeutic effects of self-reflection. This is not to say that there are no conceptual limits. Some theories of emotions as well as some conceptions of self-knowledge are indeed inconsistent with the claim that reflection, or any other kind of cognitive process, may have an impact on feeling. And if those views turn out to be true, philosophy might have to renounce its therapeutic ambition. But even though these limits exists, the plausibility of the assumption that reflection can have therapeutic effects is not dependent on one singular theoretical framework.

There is obviously more than one way the ancient notion of philosophy as a kind of therapy may find its way into modernity, and this is instructive and beneficial.[39]

39 I want to thank Angelica Baum. I have benefited a lot from the cooperation with her on our common article on Shaftesbury, and it is ultimately due to her that I discovered how much inspiration Shaftesbury's philosophy provides.

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